

Statement by Daniel Holt
PTA President, Brent Elementary School
Before the District of Columbia State Board of Education
July 7, 2010

Good evening members of the state board. My name is Daniel Holt, and I am the PTA President at Brent Elementary School, a Pre-K-5 school in the Capitol Hill neighborhood of Washington, D.C. Three of my children attend Brent—my oldest daughter is in third grade, my son is in first grade, and my youngest daughter is in pre-kindergarten. I first became involved in the school as a member of the Local School Restructuring Team, where I worked with other parents and school staff to transform Brent from a struggling school to a high performing school where parents and the community play an integral role in driving student achievement. I am proud of Brent's rich curriculum and the interdisciplinary, hands-on learning opportunities available to its students.

I am here to speak with you today about why, as a parent, I support the adoption of the Common Core State Standards. I know firsthand the importance of ensuring that all students are prepared for college and career. It is important to me not only that my three children have the opportunity to graduate from high school prepared for college and work, but also that all D.C.'s students have this opportunity. I have two major recommendations for the State Board of Education today.

First, adopt the Common Core State Standards for the District of Columbia. The adoption of clear, consistent, internationally-benchmarked standards will ensure that D.C.'s students are prepared to compete with their peers in an increasingly competitive global marketplace. The Fordham's Institute's most recent review of D.C.'s math standards rated the standards a "D," and critiques them for being inconsistent, "repetitive," and placing weaker demands on students in higher grade levels.¹ Moreover, the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), a well-regarded cross-state achievement assessment, demonstrates that D.C. students are further behind than their peers in other parts of the nation. Fourth graders in D.C. scored 18 points below the national average in reading and 20 points below the average in mathematics on the last NAEP assessment.² While elementary and high school students' scores on the D.C. Comprehensive Assessment System (DC CAS) rose considerably in 2009, our schools still have a long way to go before all our students are performing at high levels.³ It is critical that D.C.'s students are held to the same high standards as their peers in other states. Our students deserve an equal opportunity to be successful in college and in the workforce. Adopting the Common Core State Standards is a critical first step in leveling the playing field for students in the District—whether they live in Ward 3 or Ward 8.

A lack of college-preparedness is also expensive for students, families, and our communities. A recent study by the Alliance for Excellent Education estimates that it costs \$283 million dollars in tuition to provide our nation's high school graduates with remedial education.⁴ Parents and

¹ Klein et. al, *The State of State Math Standards 2005*, Thomas B. Fordham Institute, January 2005. Retrieved from http://www.edexcellence.net/detail/news.cfm?news_id=338&pubsubid=1151#1151

² The Nation's Report Card, State Snapshot, 2009. Retrieved from: <http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/pdf/st2009/2010460DC4.pdf>

³ "Reforms Help D.C. Test Scores Rise," Washington Post, July 14, 2009. Retrieved from: <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/07/13/AR2009071302783.html>

⁴ Alliance for Excellent Education, *Paying Double: Inadequate High Schools and Community College Remediation* (Washington D.C., 2006)

students are already struggling to pay regular college tuition, and should not have to pay additional dollars for remediation. In these difficult economic times, it is particularly important that we minimize, not increase, costs for students and their families. In addition to better preparing students, the adoption of Common Core State Standards would help states save money by creating economies of scale for related materials, such as assessments and textbooks. And, when states save money, so do taxpayers.

The Common Core State Standards reflect the real-life skills and knowledge and practical applications needed for success in the workplace. These standards were developed by a team of experts—including parents, teachers, and institutions of higher education and workforce development—to align what students learn in school with college and work expectations. For example, the high school math standards emphasize math problems that have real-life relevance, such as analyzing statistical data to make decisions. The English-Language Arts standards focus on building students' comprehension not only of written text, but also of spoken word and information conveyed through media. These are skills that many of us use in our daily jobs. I am excited that my children will have an opportunity to hone these skills early and apply what they learn in school to earn a wage for themselves and their own families one day. Also, it makes it easier for me to assure them that doing their homework *does* matter, that listening in class *is* essential—because I know what they are learning will truly help them become successful in life.

Second, I recommend that you engage parents in the implementation process in order to support student learning and drive school reform. As a parent, I am my children's first teacher. I need to know what they are learning in school and why they are learning it. Adopting, clear, high, consistent standards will help parents like me know what my child should learn and be able to do. Just six years ago, Brent Elementary was a struggling school facing closure. Parents and community members, along with new school leadership worked together to turn around the school and create a more welcoming environment for families and students. Today, Brent is one of the top public schools in D.C. In 2009, 68% of Brent Elementary School's 3rd graders scored proficient or above on the DC-CAS, 25% more than the state average.⁵ Common Core State Standards would increase opportunities for parents to engage in their children's education across core content areas.

Over 40 years of research has shown that parents are critical to closing the achievement gap.⁶ Families need to understand exactly what is going on in classrooms to support learning at home and drive school reform. If the State Board chooses to adopt the standards—and I urge you to make this decision—then it must include parents in the implementation process. This includes making information about the new standards as well as changes to assessment and curriculum available to parents in a format that they can understand. It also includes engaging parents to in decision-making about the implementation of standards, including professional development and curriculum.

Adopting Common Core State Standards is especially important in D.C., an area with high student mobility. Many of our families move to the suburbs during middle and high school seeking a more rigorous education that will prepare their children for college and career. Other

⁵ Retrieved from Great Schools website, www.greatschools.org

⁶ Henderson and Mapp, *A New Wave of Evidence: The Impact of School, Family, and Community Connections on Student Achievement* (Austin: Southwest Educational Development Laboratory, 2002). And M

families move in and out of the District to find more affordable housing or due to changes in employment. Ensuring that D.C.'s students have access to a rigorous curriculum and clear consistent standards would provide incentives for parents to remain in the district during their child's high school years, increasing our revenue and tax base. Core Common State Standards would also ensure that families who moved in and out of the District had consistent expectations for what their children should know. Rather than having to readjust their expectations for students after each move, families would have a clear understanding of what their children were learning and be able to support that learning at home, wherever they live.

I became involved in PTA and my children's school because I wanted to make sure they had the opportunity for an engaging, excellent education. My goal for my children is that they grow up with the skills and knowledge to pursue any professional goal of their choice. I can say with certainty that is a goal I share with parents and families across the District. Adopting the Common Core State Standards is a critical first step to achieving that goal.

Thank you, and I look forward to answering any questions you may have.